



**Spotlight  
Initiative**  
*To eliminate violence  
against women and girls*



# Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls: The Role of Religious Leaders

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Religious Leaders

By The Centre for Women's Health and Information

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# Abbreviations

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CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEWHIN	Centre for Women's Health and Information
CWEEN	Christian Women for Excellence and Empowerment in Nigeria Society
FBO	Faith-based organisations
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GBV	Gender-based violence
STDs -	Sexually Transmitted Diseases
USA	United States of America
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls



## Chapter One

# Introduction

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Violence against women and girls or gender based violence (VAWG/GBV) is one of the most widespread, persistent and devastating human rights violations in our world today. VAWG/GBV currently exists in all countries, communities and nations and is one of the biggest impediments to the full realization of women and girls' human rights, as recognized in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

As champions of the 2030 Agenda and women and girls' rights and empowerment, the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN) are embarking on a new, global, multi-year initiative focused on eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls — the Spotlight Initiative. The Initiative is so named as it brings focused attention to this issue, moving it into the "spotlight" and placing it at the centre of efforts to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment, in line with the 2030 Agenda (Spotlight Initiative, 2017).

The pursuit of gender equality has to be addressed at different levels and quarters if visible results are to be recorded. The religious/fait-based and traditional institutions are critical segments of the society where the spotlight of VAWG/GBV must be beamed. 'Religious texts and teachings can serve as resources to assist those who

'Religious texts and teachings can serve as resources to assist those who have experienced abuse in finding safety and in the process of healing, yet, religion also can be misused to excuse or condone abusive behaviour'. (Mari Fortune, Cindy Enger, 2005).

have experienced abuse in finding safety and in the process of healing, yet, religion also can be misused to excuse or condone abusive behaviour'. (Mari Fortune, Cindy Enger, 2005). Patriarchy and the conservative teachings of religious/fait-based leaders such as those relating to the need for women to be 'submissive to men' continue to impact the lives of women and girls negatively. Women's experience of abuse of their rights have however, not been effectively addressed because religious teachings are held sacrosanct by many, hence the transfer of wrong 'ideals'

from one generation to the other.

A lot of work has been done on VAWG/GBV in Nigeria but very few have focused on faith-based organizations as a major stakeholder, especially in respect of interventions. Emerging incidences have shown, however, that several cases of VAWG happen within such institutions especially indirectly through their teachings, the kind of response that they give to survivors of abuse and the approach of dealing with perpetrators. These are often shaped by the socio-cultural beliefs and disposition of the person intervening rather than being guided by the content of the religious books.

### **Why focus on religious/fait-based institutions?**

The need to focus our searchlight on religious leaders has

become imperative for many reasons:

- The influence that these leaders have been able to garner over the years, not only as spiritual ministers and moral leaders in the society, but also because the number of followership that they command cannot be ignored.
- In Nigeria especially, religious leaders and organisations command great political and social influence and the respect of communities, both local and national. It is therefore, not farfetched, that they are usually the first point of call for most survivors who seek succour and redress and, ironically, by perpetrators, who seek their assistance in appealing to survivors to 'forgive' their 'trespasses'. By this token, religious leaders become mediators and, in more instances, command the trust of the people more than government institutions such as the police and the judiciary, and constitute therefore, great stakeholders in matters of social engagements!
- Illiteracy among followers is high, as such the pronouncement of such leaders are often not interrogated by their followers, especially women, thereby leaving many in bondage of GBV.
- Because they wield so much power, it is important to build their capacity to know what is right, what to do and when and where to refer people when the need arises.

### What should religious leaders do?

- o Religious leaders need to be enlightened about the forms and causes of VAWG/GBV such that they can use the skills that they acquire to train other leaders too.
- o Religious leaders need to acquire knowledge on GBV issues and how to respond to diverse situations in ways that are harmless.
- o They can create centres where women and girls can receive financial, legal, health and psychosocial assistance.
- o Religious leaders can address issues of VAWG/GBV in their sermons highlighting the ills of these practices and promoting behavioural and attitudinal change and can also organise special

seminars for this purpose.

- o They can organise male-only activities on elimination of VAWG/GBV.
- o They can produce behavioural change communication materials based on religious scriptures and teachings and disseminate widely.

It becomes necessary therefore, to engage religious leaders and to provide proper guidance and capacity building that would enable them to function optimally in their role as mediators and social influencers in matters relating to VAWG/GBV. Engaging them is also important in order for victims/survivors of GBV who approach them for help, to not only have their cases handled from the spiritual point of view, to the neglect of other more critical interventions that they require, such as referrals for medical examinations to prevent HIV and other STDs, legal assistance for evidence gathering, psychological and professional counselling, trauma management etc.

### BASIC GUIDELINES FOR RESPONDING TO GBV BY RELIGIOUS LEADERS

- o Do no harm. Ensure first and foremost that all actions and activities respect survivors' human rights, including those of safety and autonomy.
- o Confidentiality must be maintained to protect those affected by GBV.
- o Be aware of the dynamics of GBV, particularly related to families, and use such information to evaluate the situation.
- o Be well-informed about the issues - this is critical for informing faith communities.
- o Use your expertise as a religious authority and spiritual leader to illuminate the positive value of religious traditions, while clarifying that they do not justify or condone violence or abuse.

- o GBV may sometimes require multi-sectoral responses; collaboration with social welfare, health, legal and psychosocial support services in order to provide a holistic response.
- o Explore dialogue as this facilitates communication on difficult issues.

*Adapted from: Herstad, Britt. 2009. A Call to Act: Engaging Religious Leaders and Communities in Addressing Gender-based Violence and HIV*

This monograph is designed as a resource for the defenders of the rights of women and girls in their quest to engage constructively with religious leaders as a critical constituency in the fight to end VAWG/GBV.

It will enable defenders to deepen their knowledge of the relevant texts especially within the context of Christianity and Islam. Chapter two presents different religious texts

from the Quran and Hadiths that supports the rights of women in the area of reproduction, divorce, polygamy and education. It also explores issues of gender and identity.

The third chapter is written from a Christian perspective and it explores the issue of patriarchy and women's experience of violence. It explores critically the concept of submission vis-à-vis the biblical position on leadership. The fourth chapter is an exposition of Christian scriptures as they relate to sexual and reproductive rights, while the last chapter is a presentation of information on what survivors of sexual violence need to know as well as what the different strategic actors do in the field of response to the problem of GBV in Lagos State.





## Chapter Two

# Islam and Gender Violence

Habibat Oladosu-Uthman

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### Introduction

Women, since the beginning of history and across cultures and civilizations have remained an important agent and subject. They have been depicted as the 'fragile vessel', the 'weaker sex', and even, using the pre-Islamic style, 'object of play in the hands of men' (luabi rijal) (A. al-Munajid,). In some cultures like the pre-Islamic Makkah, women are referred to as agents of 'devil' (M. I. El-Geyyoushi, 1982: 89). Others would refer to them as 'source of joy', 'partner' or 'companion'. No matter the kind of description or declamation they may have suffered, it is true that, at the advent of Islam, the circumstance of women in Arabia, and subsequently in all parts of the Muslim world where women used to suffer oppression of the male gender witnessed remarkable changes; Islam came as a liberator of the "weaker" sex.

The status, destiny and circumstance of women in Muslim societies in contemporary period have, however, called to question the aforementioned ideals in Islam. The interaction between the women and men in the socio-economic and political arena has positioned women at the receiving end of human iniquities and injustices. Almost all acts of domestic violence which occurs nowadays in predominant Muslim societies, and around the world, usually position women as victims. The questions that could be asked are; why should this be so? How do we begin to make sense of these incidences? Exactly how might we account for how Muslims departed from the pristine

Islam? How have cultures of the people interfaced with the Islamic ideals? What is the Islamic panacea to these negative trends? This paper intends to examine various forms of violence against Muslim women in/and around the world. There are various issues of concern that affect women directly in one way or the other which presumably present Islam as anti-women or women "unfriendly" ideology/worldview which in some ways project some verses from the glorious Qur'an as "oppressive" towards women.

Issues such as polygamy, women's reproductive rights, inheritance, wife battery, divorce, child custody at the instance of divorce, hijab/niqab, girl-child education and so on and so forth need to be revised to be able to meet the yearnings of the modern period. To begin these discussions, let us turn our attention to polygamy as an institution in Islam.

### Polygamy: What is it?

*"If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two, or three, or four; but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or that which your right hands possess. That will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice". (Qur'an 4: 3)*

It is the marriage of a single man to more than one



woman, it can be two, three or four but the maximum is four based on the above quoted verse of the Qur'an. Polygamy was not a new invention by Islam but an already established custom in Arabia land before Islam. During this period, polygamy and polyandry were both rampant and were practiced without any restriction. Men could marry as many women as they desired, and women could copulate with as many men as they deemed so fit.

If a woman eventually got pregnant then, the paternity of the child was usually determined by whom the child resembles! Not only that, in the words of Asma', "...the seventh Century Arabia witnessed unrestricted concubinage, polygyny, and slavery were replenished by taking women captives in war" (Asma' Barlas, 2004). This was the milieu in which the Qur'an was revealed and interpreted. At the emergence of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in Makkah, there came immediate reform of the decayed Arabian society. Unrestricted polygamy was then reformed to only four with the strict condition of the ability to dispense justice. But exactly how has polygamy becomes a weapon of oppression to women through the hands of men?

Islam is a way of life that is consonant with human nature that provides human solutions to complex situations and frown at all act of extremisms. Polygamy is actually put in place to address some social ills. In fact, the verse was evidently revealed to cater for the needs of slaves, orphaned girls and the widows who were in need of whom to cater for them after losing their loved ones to martyrdom after the second battle (Uhud) fought against the unbelievers (Kufar) of Makkah.

An objective reading of the above text of the Qur'an suggests that monogamy is the rule while polygamy becomes an exception. An exception that must be based on genuine reasons- rather than mere carnal desires on the part of any man that may want to do it. But what do we witness today? We witness on a daily basis, how men have deployed the instrument of misinterpretation of the above verse to mean a compulsory act and to treat women like commodities that can be bought and discard at will. Polygamy has been taken in the contemporary times, as compulsory as Salah (prayer) is. The justice emphasized in the Qur'an 4: 3 is no more attracting serious attention from our men, we now witness incidences of abandonment of

especially the older wives to the newly married ones.

Women have continuously become sufferers of lack of adequate care and affections, hence incidences of psychological trauma pervades our societies. Building on this discussion, one attention must also be shifted to other issues of concern to women, hence the need to look at the incidences of wife battery.

### The Qur'an on Wife Battery

".....as to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance): for Allah is most High, Great (above you all)"  
(Qur'an 4: 34 as translated by Yusuf Ali)

This verse has generated a lot of disagreements among scholars. While some scholars hold to the literal meaning of the verb idrubuhuna (N.H. Ammar, 2007:519-523) which means beat them (that is women), others hold that the verb, when properly situated in Arabic linguistic context cannot and should not be restricted to the physical battery of the woman since this would contradict other verses of the Quran and the tradition of the Prophet of Islam which enjoins good treatment of the wives (N.H.Ammar).

According to the latter, the verb "beat them" which is used in this context can be interpreted to mean "go to bed with them". This is because the Arabic root word "daraba" is sometimes used in reference to situations when "the stud-camel covers the she-camel" (have sexual relations with her). Even if physical beating were to be implied in this verse, scholars citing tradition of the Prophet, says; the beating should be such that should leaves no marks on the woman's body; it should be "with a toothbrush", (The concept of a beating with a toothbrush comes from Muhammad's statement to a disobedient maid-servant that "If it were not for the fear of retaliation on the Day of Resurrection, I would have beaten you with this miswak or "with a folded handkerchief". The beating is therefore meant to be symbolic.

When carefully read, therefore, the interpretation of



the above verse of the Quran which appears to give permission to men to beat their wives as is common in some traditional Muslim societies may not be valid after all. Such interpretation would conflict with other verses of the Quran such as:

“And among His signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves so that you may dwell in peace and tranquillity with them. And He has ordained between you love and mercy. Indeed in that are signs for those who reflect. (Qur'an 30:21)”

The following statement of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad exemplifies this. He says in part as follows:

*“None honours women except he who is honourable, and none despises them except he who is despicable. (El-Bahnasawi, 39)”*

*He also says:*

*“The best of you in faith is one who is the best of you in good conduct. The best of you in good conduct is one who treats his wife best among you. (Sahih Bukhari: Hadith 40)”*

The position of Islam on gender based violence, be it domestic, private or public therefore, becomes clear. The religion does not approve of any action which is capable of inflicting physical injury not only on women but all members of the human society. In fact, it also disapproves of unwarranted violence against animals (M. M. Ali: 535). Islam demands that men relate to their wives with compassion. It should therefore, be noted that whenever we witness incidences of violence against women, it is but mostly the conflation of Islam with cultural orientations of the people. It should also be understood that patriarchal interpretations of the texts would continually favor men over women.

### **Islam and Women's Sexual and Reproductive Rights**

Undoubtedly, aside from sexual and reproductive duties/rights of women, Islam stipulates that they are as independent as men but different in terms of their physiology. Islam provides for the exercise of women's reproductive rights and autonomy. This is true because the Qur'an favors the life of the mother over the unborn child, so women are allowed to have abortions in cases where her life is threatened, as well as cases of rape and incest. Of

course, paternity is vital to citizenship in Islam.

Though the Qur'an does not directly address contemporary family planning issues, but childbearing is one of the “mercies” God had promised in a marriage in accordance with the above quoted verse of the Qur'an (Qur'an 30:21) but not a requirement of marriage. As such anytime the life of a woman is threatened based on pregnancy, in accordance with the consensus opinions of Muslim Jurists, abortion can be the best option. Not only that, non-permanent contraceptives are also allowed on the basis of protecting women from the danger of childbirth, to avoid poverty, and to preserve a woman's beauty.

The Qur'an also endorses breastfeeding as a prominent method of family planning and requires every woman to breastfeed her child for at least two good years (Qur'an 2: 233). Thus, a mother should under normal circumstances wait at least up to two to three years before having another child. Fortunately, there is no verse in the Qur'an preventing a husband and wife from spacing their pregnancies. In fact, the Prophet warned against women getting pregnant within the period of breastfeeding, which is considered to be two full years. As such, the Qur'an and Hadith actually encourage women to take ownership of their bodies through family planning.

The current trends of high mortality rate, child marriage and incidences of healthcare complications that form the constant experiences of women are due to detachment from the historical antecedent of Islam. All these could be traced to cultural norms, disunified scholarly opinions, and patriarchal political leadership. Majority of Muslim women now feel that they do not have the independence to make reproductive health choices.

This is the reason why Muslim women are frequently portrayed as the victims of an oppressive, patriarchal system (Bartelink and Buitelaar, 2006:352), and there is a popular belief among non-Muslims that Islam is inherently 'oppressive' of women. Indeed, in recent years, the 'plight' of women in the Muslim world has been used by some political actors as a justification (sometimes retrospectively) for military intervention

in countries where patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'anic texts hold sway. Given this context, it might be assumed that women's sexual and reproductive rights and experiences are not synonymous with Islam. However, Islam is a very diverse/dynamic religion, and its interpretation differs across the Muslim world (Hessini, 2007; Marcotte, 2003), from country to country, between different schools of Islamic law, considering the geography and the norms within communities.

The Qur'an also makes specific reference to women's right to sexual enjoyment within marriage (Obermeyer, 1994, p.43), and the act of sexual intercourse is not generally considered sinful or shameful and in fact, it is considered as a meritorious/rewarding exercise if it is done within the precinct of law. Muslim scholars have consistently argued that Islamic doctrine lends itself to an egalitarian interpretation, and thus concludes that:

*"Those statements in the scriptures that stress the equality of believers before God are the authentic message of Islam, while those suggesting discrimination against women are merely reflections of the temporal conditions in which the religion developed and a distortion of its inherent egalitarianism". (Obermeyer, 1995:376)*

*"(P)ronouncements made in the name of religion carry an additional force that makes their consequences for gender equality especially burdensome. Religiously inspired principles regarding the sanctity of marriage and the sanctity of life have weighed heavily on women, because it is women who are most likely to be trapped in violent or abusive marriages, and women whose bodies bear the consequences of multiple pregnancies.' (Casanova and Phillips, 2009:39)*

In other words, given the above, the circumstances of women seem to be fluctuating between the misogynistic tendencies on the part of their male counterparts and the presumed weaknesses of their own persons as equal and response.

### **Islam and Gender Development**

In 1995, a popular and foremost Muslim jurist Yusuf

Qarad presented a perspective on the gender gap in the world and how that has negatively impacted upon development across the globe. According to him, the forces against the female gender are not only formidable but are equally multifaceted; they are religious, political and cultural in nature. He says further:

*Two different types of people have been unfair to women: the Westernized who wants to impose Western traditions, which include decadence and lack of values - especially religious, and deviation from normal nature on women; the Western who desire that women abstain from the rightly-guided path that Allah has sent Prophets and the holy books to show to the world and call them to abide by. The second type includes those who force other traditions on women, but these are the traditions of the East not the West. Those traditions are given a religious colour. Those people who made those claims made them from their sides; based on something that they understood, or a view that they initiated or preferred because it suits their views on women and their disrespect for her, her religion, her brains or her behavior (Al-Qard w , Yusuf: 1995:38).*

Following from the above, the nexus between the religion of Islam and gender development could be discussed along four different but mutually complementary axes. These include gender identity, education, economic empowerment and social freedom. This approach derives from the notion that the concept of development refers to a process of economic and social transformation that is based on complex cultural and environmental interactions (Ajaegbu, 2012).

Such complex cultural environmental indices which often serve as markers of development (Familusi, 2017) include freedom, peace, security, good health and high life expectancy among others. I have

therefore identified those five axes not necessarily because they are exclusive in relation to Islam and gender development but simply because they operate at the core of development in relation to the female gender in parts of the Muslim world.

### Identity and Gender Development

Perhaps the most fundamental impact of Islam on gender development is the religion's insistence that the female gender has a distinct and unique identity (Bullock, 2003). This is unarguably one of the earliest features of civilizational advancement wrought by the religion at its emergence in the Arabian Peninsula during the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

Islam affirms the woman's sense of self and encourages the female gender to consider itself in relation to the opposite gender as a partner, not an inferior or an object of play and amusement as had been the case among the Arabs before Islam. The negative notion of the female identity which greatly retarded the development of the Arabian societies during the era before Islam often started with the birth of the female child.

At least two different types of fate awaited her at birth: life of ignominy and scorn in the homestead of her father or burial even while still alive in order that her father may avoid the derision of the patriarchal authorities of the Arabian society for bringing a female child to the world (Qur'an 16: 59).

Thus by establishing the personhood of the female-child, and by extension, that of the woman Islam laid the critical foundation for sustainable development. It anchors this around human dignity within which neither the male nor the female gender enjoys undue advantages. Islam therefore frees the female gender from cultural forces (Angelo Nicolaides, 2015) that considers her as an appendage to the male in nature. It says both the male and female genders are vicegerents of God on earth. Both of them are expected to maintain law and order within human societies and live in harmony (Qur'an 2:30 and 38: 26).

### Education and Gender Development

Having established the juridical and legal framework with which gender harmony could be achieved in human societies, Islam further emphasizes the importance of

education in human development as a whole. In fact, in Islamic episteme, knowledge acquisition is an obligation. The Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said as follows:

*Seeking knowledge is a duty  
that is incumbent on every  
Muslim (man or woman).  
(Bukhari & Bahreisy, 1981)*

This tradition and many others that emphasize education as a key factor for development accentuate the Qur'anic position on education as a whole. In the latter, education is only precedent to a fulfilled earthly life; it is equally a sine qua non for celestial salvation. In the reckoning of the Almighty, men and women of learning occupy pedestals that are higher in creation (Qur'an 39: 9). It is their duty to guide humanity to the path of progress and development.

Thus Islam holds, as is evident in contemporary studies (Shenila Khoja-Mooji, 2018), that societies which give priority to education of women usually have substantial economic and social benefits and less health problems. Such societies are blessed to the production of human capital that is necessary for civilizational advancement. The Qur'an says:

*The believing men and the believing  
women are close allies of one another:  
They enjoin what is right and forbid  
what is wrong (Qur' n, 9:71).*

The Qur'an says further:

*For believing men and women, for  
devout men and women, for true men  
and women, for men and women who  
are patient and constant, for men and  
women who humble themselves, for  
men and women who give in charity,  
for men and women who fast, for men  
and women who guard their chastity,  
and for men and women who engage  
much in Allah's praise- for them has  
Allah prepared forgiveness and great  
reward (Qur' n 33: 35).*

It therefore becomes clear that the Prophet of Islam not only encouraged acquisition of knowledge by women, he equally considered it critical to the development of Muslim communities. Aishah, one of his wives of the Prophet (pbuh) ([Kawan, 2005](#)), eventually became a learned scholar in Qur'anic studies. History equally shows that issues of jurisprudence were usually referred to her for resolution ([Elsadda, 2001](#)). Thus, as far as Islam is concerned, the whole idea of human development would remain invalid insofar as education of women and the girl-child is neglected. If this is true, it is equally arguable to say that their affiliation to Islam would become questionable those who say they are Muslims and yet live in a state of ignorance.

### Economic Power and Gender Development

Perhaps one way to gauge the revolutionary impacts of Islam on the Muslim societies is to explore the extent to which its regulations on gender identity and education have led to improvement in the economic circumstance of Muslim women. Theoretically, there are provisions in Islam that are designed to ensure and assure equity in the access to opportunities in human societies. For example, since it recognizes and affirms the identity and dignity of each gender, Islam grants equal ownership rights to men and women with respect to what they earn through their own efforts or through any other legitimate means. The Qur' n alludes to this in the following lines:

*....to men is allotted what they earn and to women what they earn; but ask Allah of His bounty. For Allah hath full knowledge of all things. (Qur' n 4:32).*

Two different trends have resulted from this Qur'anic prescription in Muslim communities across the world. The first features conscious efforts being made by Muslim nations to facilitate access to education to women. This has been followed up with the growth in job opportunities for women. In states where this has been achieved, Muslim women have proven to be highly resourceful and innovative.

They have added extra value to the task of ensuring sustainable development for their individual nations and world at large. Such has been the case of the Federation of Muslim Women Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) that

was established in 1985. The Association has discovered the value of social mobilization and has embarked on radical steps to empower its membership through the introduction of adult literacy and skills acquisition programmes. The impacts of these efforts on human and material development of the Nigerian nation are greater than critics may be willing to acknowledge.

But subjacent to the above positive trend is the opinion that women are not under any obligation to contribute to economic development of their nation. This opinion, contrary as it is to the Qur'anic prescription and injunction, is rife among Muslims that have affiliation to or are sympathetic to violent extremist groups in sub-Sahara Africa ([Sulemana, 2015](#)). Thus Islamic normativity comes into conflict with reality; ideals which promote gender development in Islam are imperiled by Muslims whose interpretations of Islamic codes call to question the religion's positive postures and injunctions.

### Social Freedom and Gender Development

Going by the above analyses, it should be evident that a religion that emphasizes recognition of the subjectivity of the female gender and makes knowledge acquisition an obligation has established the necessary framework for social equality. Thus, there can be no gainsaying the fact that, in addition to all of the above, the social system prescribed by Islam recognizes the difference in gender make-up and consequently prescribes rules that would make for gender harmony. These rules are unique in that they emphasize gender complementarity not oppression (Qur'an 49:13).

They are equally comprehensive in nature. The operating principle is such that recognizes women's agency and subjectivity. "The woman shall not be engaged in marriage" the Prophet says, "until she approves it, and the virgin girl shall not be given out in marriage until she allows it." (al-Bukhari, hadith no. 4741). She is free to keep her maiden names even after having entered into a wedlock.

The overall import of these social principles put in place is that Islam desires an egalitarian society where

the female gender would be treated not as things but entities with rights and dignity. It is that which considers women as partners in the transformation and development of their societies. Whenever trends which negate these principles are seen in parts of the Muslim world such must have resulted not from contradictions in Islamic texts but from slippages in the interpretive interventions from scholars of the religion.

## Conclusion

This write up has shown to a large extent that, even though the history of Islam is replete with a gender-friendly atmosphere, it is clear from the experience of Muslim women that there is virtually no link between what the Qur'an stipulates and the conduct of some Muslims particularly in the area of gender relations.

It is apparent that there exists a wide gap between the Muslims and Islam. Apart from domestic violence which always put women at the receiving end, other forms of violence that usually occur within Muslim societies include intellectual violence. These violence acts against women usually occur either, as a result of the misinterpretation of some verses of the Qur'an and the Hadith of the Prophet that have to do with the issues of women or that the cultures of the people take precedence over the all-embracing culture of Islam.

Islamic texts are often interpreted in favor of men because most of the interpreters are men themselves. There is the

Islam affirms the woman's sense of self and encourages the female gender to consider itself in relation to the opposite gender as a partner, not an inferior or an object of play and amusement as had been the case among the Arabs before Islam.

tendency to interpret the texts to suit their own purpose at the detriment of women. Poverty, ignorance or negative cultural orientations are also some of the violence induced factors in some parts of Muslim world.

It is, therefore, pertinent to state that there is the need for re-education and re-orientation of the male gender in line with the Islamic provisions on the treatment of the female gender. Some of the times, the society emphasizes on the need for the education of the girl-child and women without giving proper attention to their male counterparts who are potential husbands and fathers. The society should come to realize that we are co-managers of the family institution and the entire community of Islam.

A better community is largely dependent on the healthy and solid family institutions. Muslims should also divorce themselves from the cultural hegemony that sees women as second class citizens and imbibe the Islamic culture that promotes gender equality for a better society. Until Muslim societies across the world begin to work with the general dictates of the Islamic law which provides for the improvement in the circumstance of women and forbids acts of violence against them, the story may remain the same perpetually.





## Chapter Three

# Patriarchal Ideology and Violence against Women and Girls in Nigeria

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### Background

On Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> February 2016, Nigerian media was agog with news of a self-sponsored University of Jos psychology student – Nanchin – who was strangled to death in Angwa Rukuba, Jos by her boyfriend, Badung Dele, for refusing to go out with him on Valentine's Day. When questioned by the Police, he said it was because, "I love her too much." He loved her so much that he needed to control her choices, movements and very existence.

Sadly, Nanchin is not atypical. Nigeria is full of women who are loved too much, so much in fact that violence is a daily reality for a large number of female citizens of this country. National media reports and empirical studies show that violence affecting women and girls (VAWG) is routine, persistent and prevalent all over Nigeria among all cultures, classes, age groups and faith communities.

It is true, that violence is currently a reality for Nigerians,

Failure to protect women and guarantee their fundamental human rights and freedoms as stipulated under international and national law provides the proof of State complicity in structural violence (Odinkalu, 2008).

whether male or female. But violence targeted at women and girls is primarily because they are female. The fact is, females are much more likely than males to be victims of gender-based violence. Culturally, Nigeria's tolerance level for VAWG is extremely high, and often religion plays an ambiguous role in both either promoting or combatting it. While this is true for religions in general, this article focuses more on Christianity and some key biblical references used to support or refute VAWG.

### Facts and Figures on VAWG

Statistics from a 2016 CWEENS report on VAWG among diverse people groups in Plateau State revealed that, at some point in their lives, most Nigerian women experience a form of gender-based violence. GBV is defined in the 2006 UN Secretary-General's Report on violence against women as any violent act or threat of violence or coercion that targets a person because of their sex.

Therefore, not all violence experienced by individuals is gender-based. This paper focuses on GBV aspects of VAWG. A 2014 Lagos-based study asserted that 3 out of every 10 females has experienced sexual violence by the age of 15. And this is a conservative figure given that VAWG remains underreported due to various socio-cultural and institutional factors. The 2015 study affirmed a 2008 study carried out by UN Women revealing that the violence Nigerian women and girls suffer covers the five areas demarcated in the 2008 UN Secretary General's report:

1. Physical assault (e.g. wife battery, acid attacks, political thuggery/election violence),
2. Sexual exploitation (e.g. rape, incest, human trafficking),
3. Psychological/emotional torture, defamation and intimidation,
4. Socioeconomic deprivation and isolation, and
5. Various types of harmful traditional practices (e.g. widowhood rites, FGM, polygamy, girl-child marriage).

### Victims and Perpetrators of Gender-Based Violence

Victims of gender-based violence could be female or male but disproportionately they are the former. Males and females experience violence differently and in predominantly different spaces.

#### Male Victims of Violence

Boys and men typically experience violence in public spaces in the course of work, war and conflict. Most of the time such violence is inflicted by their male counterparts. However, evidence shows that males also experience domestic violence especially as minors – they may be exposed to sexual violence from older female (or male) co-habitants, relatives or visitors.

There are reports of young boys being forcefully initiated into homosexual cults. Verbal abuse is also a form of violence and there is growing evidence to indicate that many men suffer this form of violence from their intimate partners or other female significant others who may ridicule or undermine their manhood. When it comes to physical spousal violence, Nigerian society is likely to heavily sanction a woman who hits her husband.

#### Female Victims of Violence

Unlike boys and men, girls and women mostly encounter violence behind closed doors in private spaces and in places where they should be safest, such as in homes, schools and hospitals. Consequently, the long arm of the law does not easily reach where VAWG commonly occurs and society as a whole is often unable, or unwilling, to sanction it appropriately.

In fact, society is often only too eager to turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to the numerous acts of structural and direct violence, as well as other injustices, that cause women and girls, profound pain and suffering. They could be girlfriends, wives, sex workers, widows, pupils/students, patients, domestic helpers, women with disabilities, women in the workplace (especially in relation to male colleagues and bosses), and increasingly minors.

All these are contexts where women or girls tend to have dependent or subordinate status. Age is no barrier to the nature or extent of violence; girls ranging from less than a year to women as old as 80 years have been beaten, abused or raped. In 2014, the 'ChezB' radio talk show carried a story of Rachel<sup>1</sup>, a 10 month-old baby raped by a landlord living in the same compound as her family in Jos. Her mother had left her in his care while she quickly went to collect a debt. He simply told her, "The devil made me do it." Women with disabilities are at double risk of falling victim, and stories abound to prove it.

To add insult to injury, in many instances women and girls who fall victim to gender-based violence are shamed, shunned, silenced and stigmatized for what they have suffered. People make all sorts of excuses to exonerate the perpetrator and blame the victim: She must have been rude, badly behaved, in the wrong place, provocatively dressed or, as in the case of Rachel, her mother should not have left her alone.

The 'blamers' ignore the fact that none of these excuses provides justification to batter, kill or rape a woman or girl, or deprive her of her fundamental human rights. Victims who take the bold step of reporting their abuse(r) have often been ostracised by family and friends for damaging the family or

<sup>1</sup>Not her real name

perpetrator's reputation. This is why so many prefer to bear the pain in silence, often with profound long-term consequences.

### Who are the Perpetrators?

The perpetrators of GBV, notably VAWG, are usually, but not exclusively, male. Statistics reveal they tend to be someone the victim knows such as an intimate partner, friend, relative, neighbour or acquaintance.

Overwhelmingly, the evidence also shows that males commit most of the violent attacks on females. In fact, a 2015 study of Plateau State revealed that 82.3% of incidents of VAWG were carried out by men. Contrary to common belief, incidents of VAWG are not rare or isolated cases; neither are VAWG perpetrators sick or deranged individuals. They are your ordinary 'nice' guy, next-door neighbour or someone who occupies a position of responsibility or authority in a family, community or organization. In other words, VAWG is so endemic to Nigerian society that an abuser could be a well-respected figure in public and a chronic abuser in private. The consequences of GBV are serious, severe and far reaching. Consequently, it requires urgent action.

Of course, this does not imply that all men are violent or that women are always victims. Women are also guilty of violence towards each other and have been known to inflict psychological harm, especially verbal, on men as well as women, in addition to other forms of violence. Aside from the basic reality of flawed human nature, it has been shown in sociological analysis that oppressed groups commit self-harm by turning inward on themselves.

By so doing, they become complicit in their own oppression as a convenient instrument carrying out the dirty work of the oppressor class, which appears to be a clueless bystander while, in actual fact, in-group antagonism aids its socio-political dominance.

Still on the issue of female-on-female violence, women are not the only people who can be 'their own worst enemies'. Black-on-black violence in the USA is a case in point. While the world looks on in disgust as young black male gang members obliterate each other's future, few look deeper to see the institutionalized racism that create disproportionate colour-coded poverty, inequality and

injustice. Similarly, patriarchy in Nigeria has worked to institutionalize a system of male power, privilege and prestige. But one may ask: What does patriarchy have to do with gender-based violence? The answer is simple – a whole lot!

### VAWG and the Convergence of Patriarchal and Religious Ideology

Tragically, the violence and injustice perpetrated against women and girls is often justified and reinforced by cultural and religious belief systems (Verhelst and Tyndale, 2002). Some customary norms and religious doctrines teach that it is a sign of virtue for women to endure all manner of ill treatment, particularly when meted out by their husbands. However, studies on the role of religion in promoting female human rights violations indicate that they often stem from conservative interpretations of sacred texts (Para-Mallam et al., 2011, Adamu and Para-Mallam, 2012).

Such interpretations tend to be infused with patriarchal ideology to serve the vested interests of male desire for power, dominance and control in private and public spaces. It is important to bear in mind that patriarchy as a social construct creates a hierarchy of men over men according to whichever economic system operates – capitalist, feudalist etc. Still, in the context of a patriarchal system of gender identity, roles and relations, religion becomes an instrument of gender oppression instead of liberation, freedom and wholeness.

### Structural Violence and the Patriarchal Quest for Control

GBV is as much a structural as an individual issue, implying that it stems from the way society is organized or structured. In the Nigerian socio-cultural and economic contexts, patriarchy is the reason behind male privilege and son-preference: a male to carry on the family name and inherit the family wealth (Nweze and Takaya, 2001). This aligns with the Marx's dialectic on patriarchy as a socioeconomic organizing principle of the mode of production to favour male dominance in the acquisition of capital.



In this way, patriarchy disenfranchises females economically by denying them access to land and property inheritance. Furthermore, son-preference causes parents, especially poor people, to prioritize boy-child education leading to high female illiteracy and dropout rates as well as gender disparity in school transition rates.

Thus, for the majority of women and girls all over this country, patriarchy either prevents or undermines a level playing field for equitable access to social, economic, and political opportunities, resources, and benefits. Then, it erects a 'glass ceiling' against female attainment that few are able to break through.

Patriarchal culture also stipulates diverse types of dehumanizing rites and rituals for widows while allowing widowers to grieve with dignity. Patriarchy insists that females should be subordinated to male control; violence, whether inflicted by an individual, a community or the State, is often the 'legitimate' means to guarantee it (Alemika, 2001). Ultimately, that is what violence really is – an instrument of control and for asserting male power. Dele could not control Nanchin so he killed her. If he could not have her, nobody else would!

### **Religious Socialization to Structural Inequality and Violence: Headship and Submission**

The Nigerian patriarchy brand rests on the faulty notion that women are 'the weaker sex' and should unquestioningly defer to the stronger, and naturally dominant male. Or, it reasons that because women get pregnant and nurse babies they are best confined to the kitchen and the home and are not well suited to public life. Recently, a 2012 satirical article by Femi Aribisala titled: "Christians Make Terrible Husbands," rocked social media platforms. The writer claimed that after getting born again he transited from being a good husband to a bad one due to teachings on what the Bible says about gender roles and relations. His article attests to the role religion can play in socializing members of society to accept and adopt structures of gender inequality and gender-based violence.

The logic of patriarchal ideology is readily employed as a weapon of religious coercion with scriptural references cited to assert exclusive male right to leadership being that the man is the 'head of the home' or 'guardian' (in

Islam). Male headship (or guardianship) is often interpreted to imply that the male is superior while the female, as 'helper', is the less important subordinate who is to be unilaterally submissive, subservient and naturally occupy second-class citizen status. She is enjoined to accept and be content with this state of affairs as ordained by God.

Unfortunately, too many Nigerian boys and girls/men and women are socialized into this way of thinking. Recall how the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill was thrown out by the National Assembly in February 2016, in part, because two male members from Zamfara and Adamawa States respectively declared that the bill was un-Islamic and unbiblical. Such people fail to see how ridiculous this line of reasoning is.

### **A Redemptive Hermeneutic: Alternative Interpretations**

Many Christian theologians, scholars and Bible teachers have provided alternative interpretations that reflect the central theme of God's love for truth, love and justice in human relations, and hatred for oppression and injustice. Below is a brief summary.

#### **Leadership from a Christian Perspective**

First, it is important to note that by the same hegemonic patriarchal logic discussed above, leadership positions should be filled on the basis of physical strength rather than character, knowledge, skills capacity, intelligence etc. Second, those who keep clamouring for male headship conveniently ignore the Christian perspective or definition of leadership as stated in the Bible. Biblical scholars such as Mickelsen (1986), Webb (2001), Groothuis (2005) and Keener (2006), explain that headship entails responsibility for the well-being and development of others. It is giving up oneself and one's rights in service to others for their benefit, putting one's self last and being a servant of all.

*"<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, <sup>26</sup> that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, <sup>27</sup> that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she*

should be holy and without blemish.<sup>28</sup> So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.<sup>29</sup> For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.<sup>30</sup> For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.<sup>31</sup> "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." - Ephesians 5:25-31

It never entails dominance or dictatorship as explained in the texts of scripture below.

<sup>20</sup> Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him.<sup>21</sup> And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom."<sup>22</sup> But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able."<sup>23</sup> So He said to them, "You will indeed drink My cup,<sup>bj</sup> and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father."<sup>24</sup> And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers.<sup>25</sup> But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them."<sup>26</sup> Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.<sup>27</sup> And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—<sup>28</sup> just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Matthew 20:20-28

<sup>13</sup> nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;" (1 Peter)

Jesus Christ specifically told his disciples that leadership as rulership or lording it over others was a gentile custom they were not to adopt as their practice. The 'head of the home' was never meant to be the household bully or sacred cow, rather he is to serve in love and humility in the interest of those placed in his care. Furthermore, the Hebrew word for 'helper' - ezer (Genesis 2:18) from where we get the term Ebenezer (the Lord is my helper) - was used 21 times in the Old Testament, 18 of which refer to God.

<sup>18</sup> And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." Gen 2:18"

Obviously, it contains no connotation of subordination or inferiority since God's help is available to provide support and strength, particularly in our areas of need and weakness. The New English Translation Commentary on the word ezer correctly explains:

Usage of the Hebrew terms does not suggest a subordinate role, a connotation which English "helper" can have. In the Bible God is frequently described as the "helper", the one who does for us what we cannot do for ourselves, the one who meets our needs (NOT WANTS, WISHES AND WHIMS), In this context the word seems to express the idea of an "indispensable companion." The woman would supply what the man was lacking in the design of creation and logically it would follow that the man would supply what see was lacking... (Emphasis mine).

### **Biblical Foundation for Gender Equality**

This indispensable companionship is presaged in Genesis 1:26-28 when God decides to create male and female in the divine image and gives them both the command to multiply and subdue the earth - not each other.

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all

*the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”<sup>27</sup> So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.<sup>28</sup> Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”*

Herein lies the biblical foundation for gender equality and justice: Male and female were created by God and both share in God's divine nature (Van Leuwan Stewart, 1993). Both were mandated to govern the earth. In other words, the woman was created to partner with man in global development, not to be his footstool or a tool to use and abuse as he chooses. There are those who would argue that because the male was formed first, it is natural that he should be predominant and be the leader. Others point out that the woman being formed last represents the culmination and pinnacle of God's creation (Fee, 2005). Before she was formed from the flesh and bone of Adam, the Bible records in Genesis 2:18, “...It is not good for the man (male) to be alone (singular).” Whatever the case, the Divine intention is clear from Genesis 2:24: the male and female were to abide as one in love, unity and mutual support, not as rivals or belligerents.

*“<sup>24</sup> Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” -Genesis 2:24*

It is clear, therefore, that female subordination and social exclusion from full and equal participation in public affairs is also a type of structural gender-based violence that violates the Divine Will. Here again conventional interpretations of Scripture limit female ability to develop their full human capacity and function as fully-fledged citizens. Bible passages like 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 3:11-15 are erroneously misinterpreted to consign women to silence and subservience in private and domestic arenas.

*<sup>34</sup> Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says.<sup>35</sup> And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands*

*at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.*

*<sup>11</sup> Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.<sup>12</sup> Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.<sup>13</sup> For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.<sup>14</sup> These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly;<sup>15</sup> but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*

### A Word on Biblical Submission

But the Bible says a woman should submit! Some are probably protesting. Submission has become a club to whip women into order and a constant refrain at weddings. The Apostle Paul made it clear in Ephesians 5:21 that in marriage submission was to be mutual: “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” The husband by loving his wife as himself; the wife by respecting her husband (Ephesians 5:33). A further read of the Bible shows that love and submission are two sides of the same coin as husbands are enjoined in 1 Peter 3:7 to honour their wives as the physically weaker vessel but equal partner or risk unanswered prayers, while women are also told to love their husbands (Titus 2:3).

*<sup>7</sup> Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered. -1Peter 3:7*

*<sup>3</sup> the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things - Titus 2:3*

One thing to bear in mind is that submission is not a dirty word in true biblical understanding. In Philippians 2:5-11, we see that all believers are enjoined to have the same mind as Christ who though being equal with God, did not consider equality something to be grasped but willingly humbled himself and submitted fully to God's commands.

<sup>5</sup> Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, <sup>7</sup> but <sup>[b]</sup>made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. -Philippians 2:5-11

As a result of his submission Jesus Christ was highly exalted to a place of supreme honour. Willing submission (not enforced or coerced) is construed in scripture to be a call and pathway to honour not inferiority. The bottom line is mutuality, harmony and partnership, and not unilaterality as patriarchal interpretations, which help to foster gender inequality and gender-based violence, connote.

### The Role of the Nigerian State

The State, religious and corporate bodies participate in violence by imbibing the values and norms of patriarchal ideology and culture from the wider society. Failure to protect women and guarantee their fundamental human rights and freedoms as stipulated under international and national law provides the proof of State complicity in structural violence (Odinkalu, 2008).

The Nigerian State is yet to guarantee the peace and security of women and girls by making homes and schools safe spaces or ensuring that their gender-specific needs and interests are effectively mainstreamed into state policy and legislation. This is why girls – such as those in Chibok, Dapchi and various parts of northern Nigeria in particular have been abducted with impunity. Some, like

Leah Sharibu, Alice Ngada, scores of Chibok girls and others remain at large.

Although the State has made some commendable effort in providing for female protection in principle through certain laws policies and plans, it is yet to do so in practice through diligent and effective law enforcement (Imam, 2008; Odinkalu, 2008).

Some may argue that Nigerian women are happy with their lot and indeed accept it with smiley faces! We must bear in mind that, within a patriarchal system, a woman gains societal acceptance and social capital through her willingness to pander to male ego needs and play by the rules (Para-Mallam, 2010).

The smiling faces and the cheery conversations reflect inner strength and determination, a coping mechanism for women to navigate the terrain mapped out for them within patriarchal society. Does this mean the violence imposed by patriarchy and perpetrated by the half-hearted efforts of the Nigerian State should be left unchecked? Certainly not!! No society that fails to make every effort to address inherent inequities in order to safeguard women and girls, who constitute half the population, can attain sustainable or meaningful development. As Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary-General so aptly remarked in 2006,

*Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation, and it is perhaps the most pervasive [...]  
As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development, and peace.*

The study provides empirical evidence of the severe psychological, social, and economic consequences of VAWG as well as its negative effects on women, families and national development.

### Way Forward

Thankfully, things are changing. With the constantly expanding opportunities presented by a globalizing world, more and more women are defying the odds and proving themselves to be competent captains of States, industry and innovation in every field of endeavour. Women are reinventing themselves and

must continue to do so (Ogundipe-Leslie (1994).

However, change is happening too slowly for the majority and too little for the few. Consequently, we must not rest on our laurels. Women in positions of privilege owe it to the girls and young ladies coming behind to challenge subtle and overt forms of violence, and constructively work to end them (Oduoye and Kanyoro, 1992). Fundamentally though, ending VAWG is a collective responsibility. Every member of society – male and female – has a duty to speak out and take action against it! Silence aids the perpetrator, never the victim. This is why the UN 'HeforShe' initiative is so timely and so vital.

Besides the practical activities and campaigns, going on in many parts of the world, this calls for a major transformation of mindsets through the proper exegesis of the religious teachings that often shape them. This would enable religion and faith communities to become a powerful ally in the cause for gender justice, equity and equality as proven in Gambia when Islamic clerics and scholars supported the domestication of CEDAW (Imam, 2008). Similarly, Christian clergy worked alongside women's groups and other civil society organizations to get legislation against harmful widowhood rites passed in Anambra State (Adamu et al., 2011). Social justice, particularly for vulnerable groups such as the poor, widows, orphans and foreigners, is also a major biblical theme.

*<sup>45</sup> He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD.”- Psalm 33:5*

*<sup>43</sup> Defend the poor and fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and needy.”- Psalm 82:3*

*<sup>47</sup> The righteous considers the cause of the poor, but the wicked does not understand such knowledge.”- Proverbs 29:7*

Federal and State Governments, for their part, must promote a zero-tolerance culture towards VAWG by creating a gender-friendly environment such that every place would be a safe space for females and males to survive and thrive! To do this the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act should be domesticated in all 36 States of the Federation. The 2006 National Gender Policy should

be updated and backed by other pieces of legislation that guarantee women the full range of human rights. The National Orientation Agency should translate such laws and policies into local languages and circulate them widely.

Civil society groups should engage traditional and religious leaders in instructive gender dialogues to tackle the misuse of culture and religion to justify VAWG. Law enforcement agents, members of the Judiciary, educationists and health/social workers should be trained and re-trained in GBV detection and response. The Family Courts stipulated under the 2003 Child Rights Act should be operational nationwide as a matter of urgency and should include an Assisted Parenthood Programme that helps parents and guardians keep their wards safe.

Federal and State Ministries of Women Affairs should be empowered to establish professionally staffed and equipped shelters to assist women and girls who have experienced, or are at risk of, violence. Most strategically, the State has a critical role to play in tackling structural and direct forms of violence informed by patriarchal culture and religion. It must do this by finding creative ways to intentionally and systematically root out all traces of gender prejudice and discrimination institutionalized in the policies and practices of public sector agencies.

No young woman should ever again have her life snuffed out like Nanchin's; neither should any baby girl be raped like Rachel.



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## Chapter Four

# The Bible on GBV/VAWG and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)

Sumbo Oladipo

### Introduction

Generally speaking, the issue of Gender Based Violence (GBV) and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is a rights issue and since human rights are not gender-specific, it is generally accepted that the universal fundamental human rights, as noted by the United Nations, are women's rights also.

The need to engage Christian religious leaders on the issues of GBV/VAWG is contingent on the premise that they are often the first port of call for abused women and girls, given their role in the society as spiritual and moral leaders. Survivors look to them for counselling, many times for redress and, more importantly, for arrest of the abuse, if there is a risk of it continuing, as it is often the case where the survivor is a minor living with the predator or a wife, who is married to him.

In engaging with Christian religious leaders, there is a need to clarify from scriptures, the stance of God, on issues of GBV/VAWG and to check the tendency and practice of leaders to interpret the scriptures in line with their mind-

The issues associated with abuse often requires professional counselling and other interventions that religious leaders are not trained to handle, therefore, are not in a position to detect or proffer adequate solutions to.

set or traditional beliefs. In addition to this is the fact that the issues associated with abuse often requires professional counselling and other interventions that religious leaders are not trained to handle, therefore, are not in a position to detect or proffer adequate solutions to.

Oftentimes, GBV/VAWG and other such abuses perpetrated on women is basically founded on the premise that a woman is of a lesser breed when compared to her male counterpart. Significantly however, Article 1 of the fundamental human rights prescribes the equality of all (male and female) and states that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

The Bible agrees with this position and is clear on the fact that both men and women are created in the image of God.

*"Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to our*

*likeness..." (Genesis 1:26)*

The usage of the word, 'man' is gender blind and a more accurate interpretation is 'mankind' as used in the Amplified (AMP) Version or 'human beings' as recorded in The Message and the New Living Translation (NLT) versions of the Bible. In another text, the Bible states that God called male and female, Humans (NLT) or Mankind as noted in the verse of scripture below.

*"He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created [Genesis 5:2 NKJV, emphasis mine]."*

### **Biblical Position on Some Forms of GBV**

Gender Based Violence comes in different forms and one cannot really itemise all of them, especially in the course of this presentation. However, some of these acts of abuse are more prevalent in our society than others. I would focus therefore, on a few of them that are commonplace. To do this, I have put the different types of GBV/VAWG into three major categories, and I will be examining specific abuses under each of these categories and the biblical position on some of these acts.

## **1. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

### **Physical Abuse (Battery)**

Battery could include beating or unlawful touching or use of force on a person without the person's consent. Most times, physical assault involves battery, and, often occurs in marriage, and at times, in other male-female relationships outside marriage, where the husband or male partner beats up the wife or female partner, as a matter of course. This is very common in our society and is increasing at an alarming rate.

Scriptures consider the woman as the weaker (in physical strength) sex, and prescribes that they be treated with honour. The admonition is so strong that God added a proviso that if this counsel is not adhered to, a man will lose the privilege of having his prayers answered!

*"Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs*

*together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered." (1 Peter 3:7)*

In Ephesians 5:25-33, the Bible gives a clear picture of what the relationship between a husband and a wife should be, likening it to that between Christ and the Church. Again, this is to demonstrate the value that God puts on a woman. A man is expected to love his wife and to be willing to die for her, if need be, just as Christ died for humanity. This is a high calling as it suggests that whatever the circumstances, a woman ought to be loved and treated with utmost care.

*"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her...So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church...Nevertheless, let each one of you love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."*

### **Sexual Abuse**

Sexual abuse within marriage is something that is still highly debated, with most people, especially within our culture, having the opinion that there can be no rape between husband and wife because, in their thinking, as I was once told by a female professor, "the marriage certificate is a husband's licence to sleep with his wife, any time", or perhaps, anyhow he wants! The biblical position on sexual relationship between a husband and a wife (1 Corinthians 7:1-5) specifies CONSENT from both parties, therefore it is not just about the man being willing to have sex but the woman too.

Both are admonished to not defraud one another and when there is need for abstinence, to both agree to it. It is not a one-sided admonition.

*"Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise*



*also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."*

Sexual abuse on women is not only about being forced to have sex, whether they want to or not, but also about being denied sex by their husbands! This is also a very rampant occurrence and is particularly punitive on a woman, especially in a culture that frowns on adultery by a woman while the same act is considered as 'the nature of a man', when it is being done by a man! From the scripture however, two things stand out clearly; one, sex in any relationship must be consensual and two, rape or adultery is a function of self-control!

### **Emotional/Psychological Abuse**

This is an abuse that is not seen but is probably more dangerous than physical violence. It can be likened to someone having an internal bleeding. The danger here comes from the fact that because it is not seen, it is often not addressed until it is too late and other opportunistic sicknesses have taken place. Emotional/psychological abuse includes:

- Punishing or ridiculing
  - Verbal abuse and/or refusing to speak or ignoring requests
  - Enforcing negative reinforcement programme or any behaviour programme the person does not accept to.
- The following scriptures capture the Christian culture and how Christians are expected to relate with one another in a relationship.

*"Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. <sup>32</sup> And be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you." (Ephesians 4:31-3)*  
*"But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy*

*language out of your mouth. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, <sup>10</sup> and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, <sup>11</sup> where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all. <sup>12</sup> Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. <sup>14</sup> But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. <sup>15</sup> And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. <sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Colossians 3:8-17)*  
*<sup>19</sup> Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another..." (Romans 12:9-10)*

### **Economic Abuse**

Article 23 (Right to Work) of the fundamental human rights, speaks of the right of everyone to work and to free choice of employment, with the right to just and favourable remuneration.

In the biblical account of creation, we are made to understand that men and women were created equal and were given the same blessing to be fruitful (productive) and to exercise dominion, not on fellow humans, but on other works of God's creation!

*"So God created man in His own image;*

*in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:27-28)*

Both men and women were blessed by God and both were given the mandate to be fruitful and multiply and to have dominion over other the other works of creation. The woman is equal in dignity therefore, to the man, and has the same rights to dream and to pursue her vision, expanding her horizon as much as she is able.

*"And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions." (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17)*

There were many enterprising women in the Bible and Christianity encourages everybody (both male and female) to engage in a trade. 'The Proverbs 31 woman', as she is often referred to, is an example of biblical expectations of a woman in terms of enterprise and home keeping. She was a woman who put her hand on every trade and made huge profits from it, which she invested in other businesses (Proverbs 31:10-31). The only reference made to her husband is that he is 'known at the city gates when he sits among the elders of the land (verse 23). This in itself suggests that honour is given to the man by virtue of the enterprise and economic success of the woman.

There is mention of Lydia also, an accomplished textile merchant who by virtue of her economic power, provided lodging for the apostles as they went about the business of preaching the Gospel at Philippi.

*"Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God." (Acts 16:14).*

The city of Thyatira itself was a commercial city known for

its textile and dyeing trade and a wealthy town and it was here that we had a woman who distinguished herself as a wealthy trader and a woman of influence.

Habakkuk 2:1 encourages every human to 'write the vision, and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it. In other words, anyone with a vision is allowed to advertise the vision and to call out for people who are willing to join them in making it happen. A woman has the same rights as a man to trade and, to be an employer of labour, if she is so willing and able.

## 2. SEXUAL VIOLENCE

### Intra-Familial Sexual Abuse

This includes incest (sexual relationship between father and daughter; siblings and other sexual abuse of the female originating from family members) and is probably the most common under this category of abuse. Current data shows that this is happening at an alarming rate also.

The Bible forbids strongly, all sexual abuse or engagements between family members, as recorded in Leviticus 18:6-17.

*"None of you shall uncover the nakedness of anyone who is near of kin to him, to uncover his nakedness: I am the Lord..."*

Many people argue that marriages occurred between half-sister and half-brother as in the case of Abraham and Sarah and between cousins, which was common in the Bible. However, in the New Testament, the issue of incest was totally forbidden. John the Baptist preached against Herod for having his brother's wife, for which he was beheaded (Mark 6:17). In like manner, Paul addressed the issue of incest in the Church at Corinth where a brother engaged in sexual relationship with his father's wife.

*"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a*

*man has his father's wife! <sup>2</sup> And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. <sup>3</sup>For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. <sup>4</sup> In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>5</sup> deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." (1 Corinthians 5:1-5)*

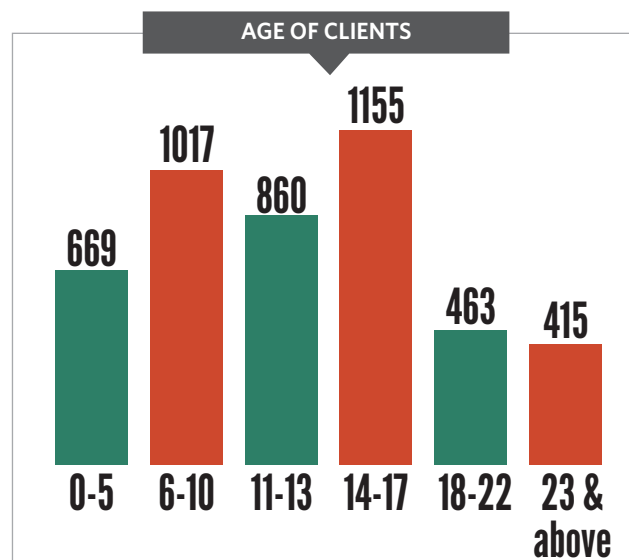
The judgement pronounced on this erring brother by Paul shows the extent of God's abhorrence of the practice. As a matter of fact, biblical laws provide for penalties for those found committing incest. These include exclusion from the covenant people (Leviticus 18:29, 20:17-18), childlessness (Leviticus 20:20-21) or even death (Leviticus 20:11-12, 14).

### Sexual Assault

Sexual assault occurs in different forms, some of which include rape, forcible sodomy, forcible object penetration, marital rape, sexual contact with minors, whether consensual or not, incest, unwanted sexual touching and any unwanted or coerced sexual contact.

### Rape

Rape is defined as sexual intercourse against a person's will. The victim could be an adult, a minor or even a wife! Statistics available reveals that rape is on the increase in Nigeria with 60% of survivors being between the ages of 0-14 years. Data from a sexual assault referral centre- Mirabel Centre collected between July 2013 and June 2019 corroborates this National Data. Ironically, religious leaders seem to take this lightly and do not address this menace with the seriousness that it deserves. More often than not, they wink at it.



It is common to hear a pastor repeatedly hounding the survivor with sermons to 'forgive' the assailant without paying adequate attention to the trauma that is being experienced by the survivor, more so, when the incidence takes place within the church! Justice or redress is not something that they focus on but would rather seek that the incident is settled as a family issue within the church. Often times, church leadership is more concerned with the preservation of the church image.

There are three specific accounts of rape in the Bible and all three brought about a violent reaction, almost giving rise to a war! When Jacob's daughter, Dinah, was raped by Shechem (Genesis 34), her brothers, Simeon and Levi pretended that they were ready to give their sister out in marriage to the perpetrator and gave a condition that the man, and his people be circumcised but while the men of the city were still trying to heal from the soreness of their circumcision, Jacob's sons killed Shechem and his father, and the all of the men of his city.

When Jacob tried to rebuke his sons for the dastardly act, their response was simple: "Should he treat our sister like a harlot?" Simply put, the sons of Jacob sought justice for the assault on their sister, possibly from Jacob himself, as their father, but when none seemed to be coming, they took the law in their hands and slew an entire city!

In Judges 19-21, a Levite had his concubine gang-raped

and killed by men of the tribe of Benjamin. When the husband of the woman reported the case, the other tribes of Israel went to war against them, destroyed the city and burnt it and swore that no other tribe would give their daughters' hands in marriage to the Benjamites. God gave consent to the action of the other tribes by specifying the tribe that will go to battle first, against Benjamin.

When Tamar was raped by her half-brother, Amnon, her brother Absalom killed him (2 Samuel 13). Again, Absalom's rebellion stemmed from David's carelessness in not addressing the rape of his daughter as he should have done. Not only did Absalom take vengeance on his half-brother, he spewed his resentment on his father by inciting a rebellion against him and his reign, so much so that David had to abdicate the throne for a season. Peradventure, if he had done the needful and handed out due punishment to Amnon, the venom of Absalom would have been quenched and the resultant effects aborted!

Contrary to present-day situation, rape was neither covered up nor ignored in Bible times, but was met with vengeful violence. The message here is that survivors of this dastardly act **MUST** be heard and protected, by all means possible, and adequate redress must be given to the survivor, as this helps in a way, to alleviate their pain. In addition to the examples given, the Old Testament specifies grievous judgements for the perpetrators of the act, some of which are seen in Deuteronomy 22:25-27.

### Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is unwelcome sexual behaviour that is offensive, humiliating or intimidating. It can be written, verbal or physical, and can happen in person or online. Both men and women can be the victims of sexual harassment. When it happens at work, school or university, it may amount to sex discrimination.

Sexual harassment includes touching, grabbing or making other physical contact with a person without their consent, making comments to them that have a sexual meaning, leering and staring, displaying rude and offensive material so that others can see it, making sexual gestures or suggestive body movements towards others, cracking sexual jokes and comments around them, asking someone for sex or sexual favours and many more.

### Sexual Exploitation

There are many forms of sexual exploitation, but the major one being practiced currently is human trafficking, where females are forced into prostitution and used as sex slaves. Another way this is done is through the employment of under-aged girls as maid and by sexually abusing them while on the job. There have been many instances where maids are constantly raped by male occupants of the house where they work, sometimes, by sons or husbands of their female employer.

There have even been situations where these girls are impregnated through rape and abortions performed on them without their consent. If eventually this is discovered by the employer, the maid is blamed for it and sent packing out of the house without any form of help or compensation.

The Bible is clear in its condemnation of this act, as noted in the book of Leviticus.

*"Do not prostitute your daughter, to cause her to be a harlot, lest the land fall into harlotry, and the land become full of wickedness...And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God."*  
(Leviticus 19:29, 33-34)

The reference to daughter in the text is not necessarily one's biological daughter but in reality refers to every female child that one comes into contact with, whether at home or at work.

### 3. HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

Harmful traditional practices (HTP) are practices to which females are subjected and for which there is usually no known benefit to them. Such practices are just based on the traditional or cultural beliefs of the society or families in which they occur. Generally speaking, the Bible frowns at traditions that negate the

scriptures and are detrimental to a person's wellbeing.

*"Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, <sup>2</sup> 'Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.' <sup>3</sup> He answered and said to them, 'Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? <sup>4</sup> For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' <sup>5</sup> But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, 'Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God'— <sup>6</sup> then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition." (Matthew 15:1-6)*

### Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Otherwise known as female circumcision, FGM is a cultural belief that is practiced in some parts of Nigeria and has no basis in the scriptures. Although male circumcision is prescribed by the Bible, it does not ask the same of a female.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), often erroneously referred to as female circumcision, is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO, 1997), as "all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the female external genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons." FGM is a cultural belief that is practiced in some parts of Nigeria and has no basis in the scriptures. Although male circumcision is prescribed by the Bible, it does not ask the same of a female. FGM is a form of gender-based violence, a public health challenge and a human right violation.

It deprives women and girls of an important part of their bodies and has many negative health impacts on the life. The national prevalence of FGM is 20% among women age 15 - 49, and as high as 51% - 62% in some states in the South West and South Eastern regions of the country. (NDHS, 2018). FGM has been outlawed in many states of the country and its practice should be condemned by all, including religious leaders.

### Early/Forced Marriage

Article 16 of the fundamental human rights specifies that marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.

Christianity supports the right to marriage through the free and full consent of the intending spouses, therefore, a woman should not be given in marriage without her consent. This right was demonstrated when a wife was sought for Isaac. Before Rebekah was given out, her family insisted on obtaining her consent to the proposed marriage.

*"So they said, 'We will call the young woman and ask her personally.' Then they called Rebekah and said to her, 'Will you go with this man?' And she said, 'I will go.' So they sent away Rebekah their sister..." [Genesis 24:57-59].*

Again, in the case of the daughters of Zelophehad, God gave the command, "Let them marry whom they think best... (Numbers 33:6)" although one must note that they were restricted to the family of the tribe of their father so that their inheritance would remain within the tribe and not be transferred from one tribe to another.

### Widowhood Ceremonies

The biblical position ensures the protection of the rights and freedom of women as well as men and makes provision for women to be protected, provided for, and granted fair treatment. There were laws in place to protect women at all stages of life, including widows, orphans, and unmarried women.

*"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise [Galatians 3:28-29]."*

*"You shall not afflict any widow or*



*fatherless child (Exodus 22:22)."*

This is particularly instructive and negates the HTP involving widows. The Bible is very strong in its abhorrence of any form of harassment against widows and also encourages them to marry when they are still young and to work when they are less than 60 years of age.

*"Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully...If any unbelieving woman or believing man has [relatives or persons who are] widows, let him relieve them; let the church not be burdened [with them], so that it me [be free to] assist those who are truly widows [Those who are all alone and are dependent]. (1 Timothy 5:14 and 16)*

Addressing the excesses and hypocrisy of the scribes, Jesus describes them as those "who devour widow's houses and for a pretence, make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation (Mark 12:40)" All of this show a social care for women in this category and execution of judgement for erring persons (Deuteronomy 27:19).

The Society overlooked women, but Jesus treated them with dignity and care; for example, He chose to reveal Himself as the Christ to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:7-29). This is another incident worthy of note, as preachers and church leaders often frown at divorce and are part of the reason why some women endure physical abuse and violence in their marriages, refusing to leave, even when there is enough reason to do so. Preachers often use the scripture, "I the Lord hate divorce" and with this, they tie down women to abusive marriages.

In this instance, the Samaritan woman responded to Jesus' instruction to go and call her husband by saying, "Sir, I have no husband" to which Jesus affirmed that she had spoken the truth, then gave the narrative of her life: "...you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband..." This woman was not only a divorcee five times over, she was also living in adultery with a man to whom she was not married, yet it did not stop Christ from ministering to her and did not stop her from preaching the Gospel in the city! "And many of the Samaritans in the city believed in

Him (Christ) because of the word of the woman who testified..."

While one is not canvassing for indiscriminate divorce, it is important to mention that when women are forced, by the family, the society and the church, to stay in a toxic and abusive marriage, they are doing her an injustice and paving the way to her grave. Proverbs 6:16-19 has this to say.

*"These six things the LORD hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: <sup>17</sup> A proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, <sup>18</sup> A heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, <sup>19</sup> A false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren."*

God hates divorce but does not hate it any more than He does a lying tongue or a proud look. There is no reason therefore, why undue emphasis should be placed on one above the other! This is the reason why the Bible recommends separation for a woman but insists that the man should not divorce his wife!

Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. <sup>11</sup> But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife. (1 Corinthians 7:10-11 (emphasis mine))

The word 'But' in verse 11, is a departure from the preceding verse and gives a proviso for a woman to depart (separate) from her husband should the situation so demand!

### **Denial of Inheritance (of father and/or husband)**

Article 17 provides the right for everyone to own property alone as well as in association with others and states that no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

The Christian faith supports the rights of women to inheritance from their parents as noted in the case of the daughters of Zelophehad. Other scriptures show the express right a woman has to buy and own

property and to also build estates and or cities.

*"Then came the daughters of Zelophehad the son of Hepher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, from the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph; and these were the names of his daughters; Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. And they stood before Moses, before Eleazar, the priest, and before the leaders and all the congregation by the doorway of the tabernacle of meeting, saying; 'Our father died in the wilderness...but he died in his own sin; and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be removed from among his family because he had no son? Give us a possession among our father's brothers.' So Moses brought their case before the LORD. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying; 'The daughters of Zelophehad speak what is right; you shall surely give them a possession of inheritance among their father's brothers, and cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them. And you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying; 'If a man dies and has no son, then you shall cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter.'" [Numbers 27:1-8]*

*"She considers a field and buys it; from her profits she plants a vineyard (Proverbs 31:16)"*

*"Now his daughter was Sherah, who built Lower and Upper Bethhoron and Uzen Sheerah... (1 Chronicles 7:24)"*

## Denial of Education

Article 26 of the fundamental human rights provides that everyone has the right to education.

Solomon, the writer of the book of Proverbs, opens his counsel in Proverbs 4 by addressing both female and male when he wrote, "Hear, my children, the instruction of a father..." It is significant that he did not address his advice to 'sons', but to 'children' (both female and male). And his

advice to both of them was to "Get wisdom! Get understanding! (Proverbs 4:5)" That is a call to get education and as someone said, it is worth noting that instruction is personified as a female (Proverbs 4:13;8:1-4)

## Conclusion

GBV and VAWG is a social menace that is fast crippling our society as it accounts for majority of the crimes being committed as well as the unstable mental conditions of many. As a matter of fact, the report of a study shows that about 70% of female inmates in the prisons and psychiatric hospitals in Nigeria got there as a result of one form of GBV/VAWG or the other.

A woman who has been continually abused physically by her husband or male partner, or indeed, any other male, gets tired one day and decides to fight back in self-defence and in a moment of rage, kills or maims the man, and she is taken away to prison for manslaughter or murder. She then becomes a victim and a villain at the same time!

GBV/VAWG is something we all have to unite to fight and as spiritual leaders who have the respect of their congregational members, it is important that they are skilled to address these issues when they are brought to their notice and to be humble enough to accept the fact that they are not knowledgeable in all things, and to refer cases that require professional interventions.



## Chapter Five

# Sexual Violence: What you need to know

### What the data is saying

Data continue to highlight women's and girls' vulnerability to sexual violence among other forms of violence. The Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS), 2018 revealed that 9% of women age 15-49 have ever experienced sexual violence, while 4% of the women have experienced sexual violence in the year preceding the interview.

Women who are divorced/separated/widowed are more vulnerable to sexual violence as 15% of them have experienced sexual violence, compared to 9% of married women.

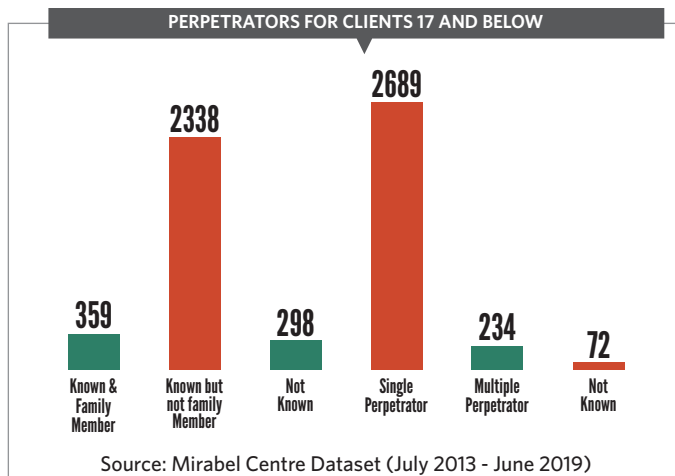
Among ever-married women, the most common perpetrator of sexual violence is a current husband/partner (65%). The most common perpetrator of sexual violence among never married women is a stranger (28%) or current/former boyfriend (27%).

Occurrence of sexual violence is higher among female children compared to their male counterparts and older females as revealed through the data collected by Mirabel Centre, a sexual assault referral centre located within the premises of the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH).



Between July 2013 and June 2019, 80.7% of all reported cases of sexual assault at the Centre were children (17 years and below). Most of the perpetrators (67%) were known persons.





### Types of sexual violence

Known forms of sexual violence include rape, child sexual abuse, and forceful penetration of objects into the private parts of victim/survivor, intimate partner sexual violence and other related crimes and violence.

### Effects of sexual violence

Sexual violence can have psychological, emotional, and physical effects on a survivor. These effects aren't always easy to deal with, but with the right help and support they can be managed.

### Have you just been raped? Calm down and take the steps listed below.

We understand that it may be very difficult to calm down with such a terrible experience. One thing you should know is that, not taking the right decision or step may compound the situation and this may lead to irredeemable consequences.

1. Do not clean or disturb anything in the area where the assault occurred.
2. Preserve all physical evidence of the assault. Do not shower, bathe, douche, eat, drink, wash your hands, or brush your teeth. You need to have a medical examination done before you can do any of these.
3. Save all of the clothing you were wearing at the time of the assault. Place each item of clothing in a separate bag and keep it in a safe place.

4. If you have access to a telephone, call a friend, a family member, or someone else you trust who can be with you and give you support. If you are not sure who to call, go ahead and call any of the CSOs whose numbers are listed below.
5. Write down as much as you can remember about the circumstances of the assault, including a description of the assailant. If you are unable to read and write, you are also encouraged to orally record the incident on your phone. Just do a voice recording of what happened – where it happened, the time, how it happened etc.
6. If you are in Lagos, arrange to go to a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) close to you (go to the bottom of this hand bill for suggestions of Centres that you can visit).
7. You will also need to report to the nearest Police Station to you to ensure that the matter is documented, investigated and the perpetrator duly arrested and prosecuted.

Note that reporting the crime can help you to regain a sense of personal power and control. You will also be helping to prevent the criminal from doing the same thing to another person.



# Sexual and Gender Based Violence: Who Does What in Lagos State?

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ORGANISATION	TELEPHONE	LOCATION	RESPONSIBILITY
Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Team (DSVRT) 08137960048	0906 288 7857	Lagos State Ministry of Justice, Lagos State Secretariat Alausa, Ikeja	Coordinates all domestic and sexual violence services in Lagos State – Crisis Support, Legal aid, coordination of all criminal justice sector response, referrals etc.
Office of the Public Defender	0708 060 1080 0805 470 7559	Lagos State Government Secretariat , Alausa, Ikeja	Have responsibility for the provision of legal aid service and advice in accordance with OPD laws also receive complaints directly from individuals or by referrals from government agencies, public institutions private institution for investigate complaints or referrals made to it.
The Nigeria Police	See telephone numbers below	There are several Divisions of the Nigeria Police in different parts of Lagos State	The Police conducts investigation and prosecute cases of sexual violence
Ministry of Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation	0708 060 1080	Lagos State Government Secretariat, Alausa, Ikeja.	Runs a Shelter and Crisis Response Centre for survivors of sexual violence and trafficking
Directorate of Citizens' Rights	0703-837-9705	Lagos State Government Secretariat , Alausa, Ikeja	Implements the State Government policy on provision quick and free of access to justice for all residents of Lagos State via Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). Creates awareness about the ills of sexual and gender based violent crimes.
Ministry of Youth and Social Development  There is a Child Protection Unit within the Ministry	0817-245-7792	Lagos State Government Secretariat , Alausa, Ikeja	Addresses issues of child abuse/gender based violence reported to the Social Welfare Office located in the Local Government/LCDA's in Lagos State. Reports can also be lodged at the Child Protection Unit of the Ministry at Alausa.
Directorate of Public Prosecution (DPP)		Lagos State Ministry of Justice, Lagos State Government Secretariat, Alausa, Ikeja.	Offers legal advice and prosecutes cases in courts
Non-Governmental Organisations NGOs/CSOs	See telephone numbers below	There are several NGOs in different locations of the state – (See telephone numbers for some of them below)	Most offer referral, counselling and legal services . A few offer medical services

ORGANISATION	TELEPHONE	LOCATION	SERVICES OFFERED
MIRABEL Centre  Opens Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. till 5 p.m. There are duty Nurses and Midwives on call Saturdays and Sundays.	0701 349 1769 0815 577 0000 0818 724 3468 0818 724 3648 0817 627 5732 0805 626 8573	Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH), Ikeja, Lagos.	A One-Stop Sexual Assault Referral Centre. Provides free medical and counselling services. It has specially trained doctors and nurses, and trained counsellors for survivors of sexual abuse. Provides immediate emergency medical treatment, forensic medical examination, and crisis support.
Women At Risk International Foundation (WARIF) Opens Monday - Saturday (including all public holidays) from 8 a.m. -5 p.m.	0809 210 0008	6, Turton Street Off Thorburn Avenue, Yaba Lagos	The Centre is a fully equipped facility that provides Full medical and forensic medical examinations and treatment, Counselling and Therapy Services and a 24-hour telephone support services as well as legal support/referral services.
The Cece Yara Foundation Opens Monday - Friday from 8 a.m. - 5.30 p.m.	Child Helpline: 08008008001 Hotlines 07007007001 09085692623 09085692612 Email: Help@ceceyara.org	2A Akin-Ogunmade Davies Close, Gbagada Phase II, Shomolu, Lagos	Provides a one stop response to child sexual abuse. The Centre provides access to care, information, protection and emergency intervention.  The Cece Yara Child Advocacy Centre provides free services -24hours Child Helpline, legal, professional counselling, medicals, forensic interview, shelter, psycho-social support and referral services.
Media Concern Initiative (MediaCon)	0809 952 2487 0805 820 7164 0802 333 1036 WhatsApp Line 0805 820 7164	15A Bolodeoku Crescent, Dideolu Estate, B/w Sweet Sensation / First Bank/KFC, Ijaye Road, 2nd Gate Bus-stop, Ogba, Lagos.	Provides emergency and crisis intervention to survivors of sexual violence and their families with referral services to access medical and legal services. Offers Rape-related mental health/stress assessment and treatment, trauma management counseling & therapy as well as psychosocial support. It manages confidential helplines.
Action Health Incorporated (AHI)	0812 344 5837	17 Lawal Street, Off Oweh Street Fadeyi Lagos.	Offers young people sexual/reproductive healthcare services, non-judgmental counseling, laboratory services as well as referrals
Project Alert on Violence Against Women	0818 009 1072 0818 050 0788	21, Akinsanya Street Off Isheri Road, Taiwo Bus Stop, (Behind FRSC), Ojodu Berger, Ikeja Lagos.	Offers comprehensive support services to SGBV survivors and families of victims. These support services include counselling, shelter, legal aid (including accompanying survivors to police stations and ADR); medical assistance; skills acquisition; and referral services
Women's Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC)	0818 005 6401	9b James Oluleye Crescent (Harmony Enclave), off Adeniyi Jones by Koko bus stop, Ikeja, Lagos.	Offers referral and other survivor support services, including free legal services

Women's Rights And Health Project (WRAHP) Opens Monday - Friday from 9 a.m. -5 p.m.	0701 9485577 0803 718 3072	196, Egbe-Ikotun Road, Ile-Epo Bus/Stop, Ejigbo, Lagos State	Offers counselling, impact mitigation and referral services free of charge
Community Women's Rights Foundation	07063108587	12, Agudindu, Selewu, Igbogbo Ikorodu	Offers referral, impact mitigation and social support services free of charge. Monitors health facilities and provides linkage to the Police for quick access to services
Centre for Women's Health and Information (CEWHIN) Opens Monday - Friday from 9 a.m. -5 p.m. Calls can be received at any time.	0802 313 0167 0802 319 4731 0907 418 7490	34 McNeil Road, by Akintoye Street, Sabo, Yaba, Lagos.	Offers referral, impact mitigation and social support services free of charge
Child Protection Network (CPN), Lagos State Chapter	0806 584 1438	SOS Children's Village 153, Mushin Road, Lagos	Members of the Network offer a variety of services regarding prevention, impact mitigation and protection of children from all forms of abuse
Freedom Foundation (Genesis House)	08087290000	The Dome, 1 Freedom Way, Lekki Phase 1, Lagos	A female residential rehabilitation and resource centre in Lagos. It is structured to support vulnerable women within the ages of 18 - 25 years-old who have been sexually abused.
Real Woman Foundation (RWF)	08037178963	7 Jubilee Road, Off CMD Road, Magodo, Shangisha, Lagos	Runs the Peace Villa Rehabilitation Centre which provides healing & empowerment for children and women. It also runs The Love Home Orphanage provides shelter for children
Pastor Bimbo Odukoya Foundation (PBO)	0803 5800 201 08093933439	12 Industrial Estate, Ilupeju. Lagos	Pastor Bimbo Odukoya Foundation is a faith based organization that provides support to women and particularly young girls

## TO ACCESS SERVICES OFFERED BY GOVERNMENT

All the Primary Health Centres listed below are equipped with rape kits. Survivors of sexual assault can therefore receive free medical services from any of them.

- |                               |                          |                       |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Ayantuga PHC (Ikorodu)     | 13. Akowonjo PHC         | 25. Apapa LGA         |
| 2. Imota PHC                  | 14. Amuwo Odofin PHC     | 26. Apapa Iganmu LCDA |
| 3. Ita-Elewa PHC              | 15. Badore PHC           | 27. Badagry LGA       |
| 4. Ikosi PHC                  | 16. Epe PHC              | 28. Olorunda LCDA     |
| 5. Ogudu PHC                  | 17. Eti-Osa PHC          | 29. Ibeju Lekki LGA   |
| 6. Ketu PHC                   | 18. Ijanikin PHC         | 30. Lekki LCD         |
| 7. Oshodi PHC                 | 19. Ikate PHC            |                       |
| 8. Isolo PHC                  | 20. Ikoyi PHC            |                       |
| 9. Lagos Island PHC           | 21. Iru VI PHC           |                       |
| 10. Ifako PHC                 | 21. Obalende PHC         |                       |
| 11. Palm Avenue PHC, (Mushin) | 22. Orile Agege LCDA     |                       |
| 12. Ilasa PHC, Agboji PHC     | 23. Ajeromi Ifelodun LGA |                       |
| 23. Ojo PHC                   | 24. Ifelodun LCDA        |                       |

The following police stations have trained Police Officers that handle matters with utmost confidentiality and professionalism:

POLICE STATION	CONTACT TELEPHONE NUMBER	POLICE STATION	CONTACT TELEPHONE NUMBER
Adeniji Adele, Lagos Island	0810-498-2245	Panti	0807440 8863
Isokoko	08081774694	Ikorodu (Igbogbo)	0806 288 7854
Ilupeju	08033137432	Ketu	0906 288 7860
Festac	090 288 7841	Ikotun	
Alakuko	0906 288 7861	Gender Desk, Police Command, GRA	0703 833 8008
Badagry	0906 288 7852	Ikeja Divisional Police Station (Area F)	
Ajah	0906 288 7849		



**CEWHIN**

Centre for Women's Health and  
Information (CEWHIN)

34, McNeil, by Akintoye Street, Sabo, Yaba, Lagos.  
Telephone Number: 09074187490.  
[www.cewhin.com](http://www.cewhin.com)